Diocese of Pennsylvania May 23, 1966

EPISCOPAL ASSISTANCE [by Bp. DeWitt]

The Diocese of Pennsylvania has for quite a few years been accustomed to more than one Bishop on the Staff of the Diocese. The death of Bishop Armstrong meant that there was then only one Bishop in the Diocese, which immediately raised the question of Episcopal assistance. There was a sense of considerable urgency on the part of many people, clergy and lay, at that time about this question, and the present Diocesan has been urged by many to proceed to call for an election of a Suffragan Bishop. This concern about Episcopal assistance has been much appreciated by the present Diocesan, and is a concern which is very valid.

One of the first things done following the death of Bishop Armstrong was to set-up an "Organization and Structure Committee" by action of convention, charged with the responsibility for bringing in suggestions concerning the organization and the structure of the Diocese. One of the central concerns of this body has perforce been with the matter of a Suffragan. The effort of this committee has not been to come up with a blue print for the entire diocesan structure, but rather to make intermediate recommendations and to take intermediate action which would tend to reduce the size of the total problem, and also bring more sharply into focus the residue of the problem. A large portion of that residue is Episcopal assistance. This diocese has fortunately been able to "buy time" on this important matter by virtue of the presence on a full time basis of Bishop Tsu, of Bishop Hart for a few months of the year, and the full time presence of Bishop Swift for an interim period. This fortunate circumstance has enabled us to take a more thorough and careful approach to the question, avoiding precipitous action. Of course, this cannot be expected to last indefinitely, and I feel the time is coming soon when we should resolve this fundamental matter of policy with reference to the organization of the diocese,--the matter of Episcopal assistance.

The former custodian of the Book of Common Prayer, Dr. John W. Suter, once told "The Parable of the Altar Guild", in which he related the story of an altar guild which wished to raise flowers for the Cathedral altar, but felt that since their garden plot had been blessed, and because of the manifest sacred purpose for which the flowers were to be used, they need not be bothered by the laws of horticulture, to which commercial florists and gardners must pay so much attention. The conclusion of his parable was their conversation with the Bishop's gardner, who reminded them that the "Laws of Horticulture" were nothing other than the Laws of God. This parable is pertinent because it would seem that there is an urgent necessity for us, in approaching the problem of Episcopal assistance, to see this in a rational manner as a not unusual problem of management, fundamentally similar to a management problem in any other area of business, government or education. I stress this point because there is a general presumption on the part of many clergy and laity in the diocese that the very real problem of Episcopal assistance necessarily requires additional Bishop or Bishops for its solution.

The background of this presumption is very understandable. Ours is by name and tradition an "Episcopal Church". This means it is a church which has to do centrally with the historic office, role and function of Bishops. As Ecumenical discussions in the past decades have made clear, this is the most distinctive thing about our Church as contrasted with other Protestants bodies. This is a tradition, an office, and a function which we value very highly. For guidance, leadership and help, the clergy of our Church are accustomed to looking to the Bishop. The laity do not perhaps feel so personally about this as do the clergy, but they have a certain stereotype about the Episcopal aspect of our Church. This would suggest to them, quite understandably, that if one needs secretarial help, he gets an additional secretary, and therefore if he needs "Bishop-help", he gets another Bishop.

As we have said, the basic posture and expectation is very valid and thoroughly understandable. Ours is an Episcopal Church. The question before us is how can this historic and valued office best be used for the welfare of the church. There would seem to be three basic responses to this question. I would like to deal with them in succession.

(1) The first possible solution would be that of sub-dividing the Diocese. Ours is amongst the five or six largest dioceses in the country, and it distinctly does have problems which derive from its size. Certainly, by contrast, the matter of Episcopal assistance, in terms of an additional Bishop, is no problem for the Diocese of Delaware! It is conceivable, therefore, that by proper and judicious sub-division of our diocese into two or more, the resulting dioceses would be sufficiently small in size to obviate the problem of additional Bishops for any one of those resulting dioceses.

There are two distinct difficulties with this particular approach. The first and most important difficulty has to do with the growing recognition for the importance of regional planning in all areas of life, religious as well as secular. We find our diocese fortunately situated in one distinct metropolitan area, where if there were more than one diocese present it would be necessary for them to discover ways and means of cooperation whereby they could accomplish joint planning and program. We already have, by being one diocese, a structure which provides that frame of reference which otherwise would have to be sought. This is no academic point. Many dioceses throughout our Church which impinge upon a metropolitan area which finds itself partially located in an adjacent diocese have been at great pains and trouble and effort in recent years to set up all manner of joint committees making it possible for them to accomplish what could and should take place as a normal part of our diocesan planning and program.

Secondly, the matter of diocesan boundaries is obviously a problem of the National Church which cannot be worked out unilaterally by any one diocese, and so in a sense it is a question over which we do not have jurisdiction. It may well be that the National Church will eventually come up with plans for the re-drawing of diocesan boundaries, and indeed there is a standing commission working on this problem. In the meantime, however, this is not a problem about which we can do anything by ourselves.

(2) A second solution would be the addition of a Bishop or Bishops to our diocesan staff. This solution which, as we indicated earlier is the expected solution in this diocese, has a long tradition behind it in the church from which we came, the Church of England. In the English system very frequently the Suffragan is given an area responsibility. A diocese there is usually sufficiently large so that it encompasses two or more cities, and the Suffragan would come to be known as the "Suffragan Bishop of Plymouth", indicating the particular city over which he had responsibility, under the wider jurisdiction of the Diocesan, the Bishop of Exeter. Even more important, perhaps, is the fact that in the English tradition the Suffragan Bishop is appointed by the Diocesan. Actually the appointment formally comes from the Queen, but on nomination of the Diocesan Bishop in consultation with the Archbishop. This does make for a "lame duck" situation if the Diocesan dies or retires before the Suffragan, but in the meantime he has an Assistant Bishop who is the Diocesan's own appointee. I have been, in recent years, in correspondence with the Archbishop of Canterbury about this matter, and he testifies that the system seems to work quite well. The only difficulty they experience is when a new Diocesan inherits a "carry-over" Suffragan from the previous Diocesan.

Our American tradition is an adaptation of the English system just described. Because of our strong democratic tradition, however, our Church has always insisted that Suffragan Bishops be elected by the Diocesan Convention, precisely as is the Diocesan Bishop. Further, in the American Church the Suffragan usually finds him-

self working as an assistant to the Diocesan, rather than having the kind of area responsibility so common in England. This unquestionably has a lot to do with the increasing concentration of American population in large cities, so that a given diocese, like ours, does not readily lend itself to geographical sub-division.

There is a further factor about the American system which is worthy of note. In the election of a Suffragan the delegates and particularly the clergy, usually feel very strongly that what they are doing centrally is electing "a Bishop in the Church of God", and not one who is primarily being elected as an assistant to the present Diocesan. There is great validity in this attitude. In our history, it is evident that Suffragans with considerably high frequency often become Diocesans in their own or some other diocese. Given this presumption, it is a matter of considerable importance as to the caliber of man elected as Suffragan. This factor often, if not usually, will out-weigh the fact that the man to be elected also is to be an assistant to the present Diocesan.

This means that there is implicit in the election of another Bishop the problem, or the tendency toward creating the problem, of a separate sub-focus of Episcopal authority in that particular Diocese. That this system can work is made manifest in several dioceses which come to mind. But the very troublesome fact remains that the Suffragan is a Bishop by virtue of a mandate from the diocese, and it is not surprising that there is considerable experience in our Church or difficulty in the relationship between the Diocesan and the Suffragan.

Another aspect of this same point is that a Suffragan is therefore, in the mind of the delegates at the electing convention, not being designed to fill a specific staff need in the total organizational structure of the diocese, but again is being elected "as a Bishop in the Church of God". Any Diocesan Bishop is necessarily limited in his abilities. There would be a presumption that the diocese which elected him had a basic confidence in his policies and in his leadership, otherwise he would

not have been elected. Surely, however, they also realize that there are necessarily some gaps in his abilities which will have to be filled in some manner. If he be an outstanding pastor, for example, there is a possibility that he will be in real need of administrative assistance. And since it is difficult to imagine a Diocesan Bishop who had all the gifts needed, how can these inadequacies be filled?

To restate the problem: any Diocesan Bishop, and certainly the present writer, has particular inadequacies in his management capabilities. How can these inadequacies best be filled? Because the present Diocesan is so centrally involved in that question, it is only natural that he has given continued and serious thought to this during the past two years.

I think all would agree that this diocese, as would be true of any modern institution in an era of such great transition, needs the very best management pattern it can get, and should not be required to meet its great challenges with a haphazard organization and structure. It would seem that to elect a person to fill a specific staff need is somewhat suggestive of the game of pinning the tail on the donkey. It can work, but isn't there a better way?

(3) It would seem that "a better way" for the locating and appointing of critical management personnel would be a method which would select the person for the specific task which was needed to be done on behalf of the Diocese. A good present example of this is the office of Archdeacon. The over-sight of thirty-odd diocesan missions is something which perhaps any competent clergyman could do passingly well, and that therefore a Suffragan Bishop should be able to discharge with reasonable competency. Indeed, this was one of the specific areas of responsibility assigned by Bishop Armstrong to the present Diocesan when the latter was elected Coadjutor in this diocese. However, when one reflects that we have now in this position of responsibility one whose training and experience has qualified him peculiarly and exceptionally for precisely this kind of job, that he has been specializing in this kind of problem in the life of the Church for the past several years, it is difficult to see how filling this

this function with the proper person could have been done nearly as well by a process of election as it was by a process of selection and appointment.

A problem in the immediate future of the diocese parallels this. Of strategic importance for the future of this diocese is the development of its program. The Committee of Council studying this matter has specified four criteria for this person. First, he should be a person of theological grounding. Secondly, he should be a person who knows with deep comprehension the dynamics which determine the life of our modern metropolitan areas. Thirdly, he should be a person who has proven ability as an administrator, and finally he should be a person who can "front" for this concern in the life of the diocese,--he should be able to articulate clearly and commend widely the urgency of the development of such a diocesan program. Here again it is difficult to contemplate an Episcopal election being the best method whereby such a person with these particular qualifications could be secured. Yet this is a position which, in the life of the diocese, would compare favorably with the importance of a typical Suffragan in a typical diocese.

Finally, there is the obvious difficulty of exits. If a Suffragan proves unhappy in his position and would like to change, or if his functioning proves unsatisfactory to his Diocesan, the only viable exit, short of retirement, is for him to be elected to some other diocese! Manifestly, the situation is not nearly so difficult if a clergyman or layman has been appointed to a specific job. He can then easily remove, or be assigned, to some other area of work in or out of the Diocese.

To repeat, the Church needs not haphazard but the very best management and leadership it can get, as is true of any other modern institution in this era of great transitions. This suggests to me very strongly, and particularly in the light of all of the foregoing, that the most critical staff positions in this diocese should be filled on the basis of specific abilities of a person to perform the specific task needing to be done. This increasingly inclines me, therefore, away from the

approach of the election of a Suffragan Bishop, and toward the development of a diocesan staff created by the wisest possible kind of appointment-methods of persons qualified to do the specific tasks required.

The reef on which this direction of thinking would surely founder would be if it would only lead to the melancholy discovery that our diocese is simply too large for one Bishop to be able to perform those tasks which must be performed by a Bishop. Let me speak briefly on four aspects of this. The ruling principle to me would seem to be that a Bishop should do what can be done only or best by a Bishop.

A. Pastor: He is the pastor of the pastors. In our diocese this means there is a diocesan family of about three hundred clergy for whom the Bishop has a responsibility as pastor. His relationship to his diocesan family parallels very much that of a priest to his parish family. And the same kind of creative thinking which many parish priests have been doing with reference to their pastoral responsibilities could well be paralleled by such thinking with reference to the Bishop's pastoral responsibilities. For example, in recent years many parishes have instituted lay calling to augment and support the priests' ministry. Several categories of calls have proved particularly appropriate to this kind of lay ministry. Initial calls on new families, calls on the chronically ill and the aged are illustrative. The parish is not less, but more of a parish family as a result of this sharing and spreading of the Church's ministry. When we think of applying this approach to the diocesan frame of reference, it suggests very strongly a more creative use of our convocational structure. Particularly, it brings to mind the current proposal for the redrawing of convocational lines, the reduction of their size by the multiplication of their number. This proposal, issuing from the Organization and Structure Committee, and currently being discussed across the diocese, envisions twelve convocations. With certain financial and administrative matters pertaining to diocesan missions now being handled

more efficiently by an Archdeacon, this allows for a much stronger pastoral ministry on the part of the dean toward the clergy in his convocation. Just as a lay ministry in a parish does not replace, but augments and supports the pastoral ministry of the priest, so this utilization of deans would not replace, but augment and support the pastoral ministry of the Bishop. With such an ordering of our diocesan family life, one Bishop could indeed be pastor to three hundred clergy.

B. Confirmations: The Bishop has a responsibility for confirmations. We are in the process currently of experimenting with a process whereby parishes are grouped for confirmation services. With the assistance of Bishops Tsu and Swift, this has proved logistically possible. In the event that they were not on the scene, neighboring and retired Bishops are in sufficient supply for their responsibility in this matter to be filled. Our present experiment has given rise to many difficulties, many of which are logistical and it remains to be seen how adequately this pattern, as is so frequently done in England, can be established here in this diocese. If it proves successful, the volume of confirmations would not be sufficient reason for the election of an additional Bishop in this diocese. Indeed, many people are viewing as very unwise the creation of additional Bishops solely for the purpose of confirming.

C. Visitations: Visitations are a canonical requirement of the Bishop. He is required by Canon to visit each parish and mission at least once in every three years. Given the number of Sundays and the number of churches in this diocese, the three year cycle works out very readily for one Bishop. I might insert parenthetically that the elimination of confirmation as a part of the visitation has so greatly enhanced the value and meaning and depth of the latter as to be, in my view, quite dramatic. During this period of experimentation with confirmations, I have been deeply gratified, and I believe many of the clergy have likewise, with the meaningfulness of the communication possible at the time of these Episcopal visitations. Adequate staff help in terms of supplying specific information or briefing on particular questions and difficulties in the parishes being visited has been of tremendous assistance likewise.

D. "Front Man": In our Episcopal polity the Bishop has a responsibility for personifying the concerns and the concern of the diocese in the larger community. This sometimes entails involvement on a deep level, sometimes it is more of a symbolic kind of representation. In either case, our Church does have in the Office of Bishop a means whereby the Bishop can personify the diocese in a very helpful way. This kind of valid requirement of the Office can be more or less difficult with reference to the Bishop's schedule, depending upon the adequacy of the staff help he has at diocesan level. In a very real sense, this is another one of those areas of need which can be filled "only or best" by the Bishop.

In these four areas of responsibility which can be discharged "only or best" by a Bishop, it would seem there exists a strong likelihood that they can, in our diocese, be discharged responsibly and adequately without Episcopal assistance in the form of a Suffragan. Our obligations under Mutual Responsibility and Inter-dependence in the Body of Christ requires that we analyze carefully our organizational structure, and the way we do things. This particular matter under discussion is one of the very vexing issues in the life of our entire Church. One Bishop recently applied for consents from the other Bishops for permission to move to the election of a Suffragan. One of his brother Bishops, in refusing to give his consent, wrote as follows: "Sometime soon this Church of ours has got to stop electing assistant Bishops at the present rate, and think through its administrative and pastoral machinery. We now have more Bishops per member than any other branch of the Anglican Communion; indeed we have as many Bishops in our 3½ million member Church as do the Roman Catholics in this country with their 40 million." I know that many other Bishops concur in this attitude. And it is safe to say that virtually all Bishops in our Church are deeply concerned to find a wiser and more effective use of this office.

Finally, these are critical as well as exciting times in which we live.

One of the great winds blowing throughout Christendom today is the wind of ecumenicity. In the conversations of Christian Protestant bodies looking toward unity, one of the great gifts which we could bring to such a united church would be our great tradition of the Episcopacy. The manifest value of this office and tradition is increasingly seen by other Protestant bodies. At the same time, it has been the most critical question in these conversations. Surely the way we can most commend this office to our Brethren in other bodies is by seeing that this office is made as effective, as meaningful, and as efficient as the great tradition behind it warrants.